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ABSTRACT

A program growing from the need for foreign college students to have more contact with native English-speakers matches a university extension program's students of English as a second language (ESL) with American students studying foreign languages at the university level. The ESL students are given the native students' telephone numbers and required to make the first contact. At this point, the ESL students may encounter a telephone answering machine, and a curriculum unit is designed to familiarize students with its use. The ESL students invite their respective partners to a reception hosted by the English program, and arrange their individual meetings. Participants are encouraged to evaluate the program and their experiences. The program has fostered friendships and intercultural communication in addition to conversation practice. Copies of the initial letter and sign-up sheet sent to language departments, the memo and sign-up sheet sent to ESL teachers, the assignment letter, evaluation forms, and a variety of comments about the program and the partners made by participants are included. (MSE)

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THE CONVERSATION EXCHANGE PROGRAM FOREIGN AND AMERICAN STUDENTS TOGETHER:

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
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by
Helen Fragiadakis, U.C. Berkeley
Amy Licwinko, U.C. Berkeley Extension

FD274194

My partner helped me to understand American lifestyle better. I feel that she helped me with English and I will help her with Japanese in Japan.

We have become good friends. This was the best part of the (ESL) program for me.

--Foreign students

I learned more French in a few meetings with my partner than in my French conversation class on campus.

This is a great program. I have really enjoyed meeting with my partner each week. I have also enjoyed making a new friend. This program should most definitely be continued in the future; it is a stimulus to learning a new language.

--American students

The above comments express the satisfaction felt by students participating in the Conversation Exchange Program between U.C. Berkeley and U.C. Berkeley Extension. These comments also show people interested in coordinating such programs the positive feedback that they will be rewarded with once they set such a program in motion.

Our program grew out of the need for our foreign students to have more contact with native speakers of English. In many cases the only Americans our students were speaking to were their ESL instructors and local merchants. This was a great disappointment to those who had come to the U.S. with great expectations about learning English, experiencing American culture, and meeting Americans. It is true that the students enjoyed being with their classmates from around the world, but they also felt isolated from the "natives," and repeatedly stated that it was extremely difficult to meet Americans.

Presented at TESOL '86, Anaheim, California.
Parts of this article appeared in CATESOL News, February, 1982, Vol. 13, No. 5 and March, 1983, Vol. 14, No. 5.

FL016067

Realizing that a large number of Americans studying foreign languages were nearby on the U.C. Berkeley campus, we undertook the effort to try to pair our students with these students for conversation. We found the Americans to be very enthusiastic because they, for the most part, are geographically isolated from countries with different languages and have difficulties finding natives with whom they can practice their foreign languages.

This "pairing" started over five years ago and has come to be known as the "Conversation Exchange Program." In the following we will explain the procedure which we used to set up the program and include samples of the paperwork involved: letters of introduction, sign-up sheets, assignments leters, and evaluation questionnaires.

To set up such a program, a letter and sign-up sheets should be sent to foreign language departments on a campus. The letter should (1) explain the rationale behind a conversation exchange; (2) explain the English program and describe the students (pre-academic, immigrants, etc.); (3) state that the exchange is entirely optional and that the pair would decide where, when and how often to meet; (4) stress that students should sign up only if they are sure that they will have time for the exchange; and (5) state that every effort will be made to find conversation partners for those who signed up, but that not all can be guaranteed partners.

Grant #1

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

BERKELEY • DAVIS • IRVINE • LOS ANGELES • RIVERSIDE • SAN DIEGO • SAN FRANCISCO SANTA BARBARA • SANTA CRUZ

INTRODUCTORY LETTER TO U.C. CAMPUS FOREIGN LANGUAGE DEPARTMENTS

UNIVERSITY EXTENSION
ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROGRAM
2223 FULTON STREET
BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA 94720

(415) 642-9833
TWX: 910 366 7114 UC BERK BERK

TO: Instructors of _____

FROM: Amy Licwinko, Head Teaching Assistant
English Language Program, UC Extension

RE: CONVERSATION EXCHANGE PROGRAM

UC Extension offers 8-week intensive courses in English as a second language for foreign students who either plan to study at an American university or desire to learn English for personal or professional reasons. Most of our students are in their early twenties and have university degrees. They come from all over the world and many of them have difficulty meeting Americans. It is for this reason that we arrange conversation exchanges. Specifically, we pair an American studying a foreign language with a native speaker of that language from our student body. The pair decides how often to meet and how much time they speak in each of the two languages, though we recommend at 50-50 exchange.

Last quarter's conversation exchange was quite successful, and we would like to continue pairing up our students with yours. We would greatly appreciate it if you would take the time during the FIRST week of the semester to pass the attached sign-up sheet around your class and then return the sheet to the above address AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. The English Language Program is still on an 8-week quarter system; August 25 - October 17 and October 27 - December 19. We would like to have a reception for all participants to meet for the first time and arrangements take time to organize. Passing around the sign-up sheet in your class should only take a few minutes. Last quarter, sign-up sheets trickled in even through the sixth week, when the quarter was more than half over. Please tell your students that our students will call them. Only students who are sure they will have time for the exchange should sign up.

Our enrollment is smaller than each of the foreign language departments on the Berkeley campus so if your students do not get called by one of our students, it is only because we cannot accomodate all of your students this quarter, but we do run two quarters during your one semester. This exchange program is on-going each 8 weeks, so your students are encouraged to try again. We cannot guarantee that everyone will be called, but we will encourage our students to make the calls as soon as we receive your sign-up sheet.

If you have any questions or comments, please call me at 642-9833 or 642-0237. If you wish to correspond, please send letters to the above address.

Thank you,

Amy Licwinko

Amy Licwinko

ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROGRAM CONVERSATION EXCHANGE
UCB EXTENSION
2223 Fulton Street
CAMPUS ATTN: Amy Licwinko
TEL: 642-0237/642-9833

SIGN-UP SHEET FOR AMERICAN STUDENTS

INSTRUCTORS: PLEASE PASS THIS SHEET AROUND IN YOUR CLASSES. Only students who are sincerely interested in the program should sign up, and they should be willing to speak English and their foreign language on a 50-50 basis during the exchange. Please return this form as soon as possible to the address on the left. Thank you. Participants will be notified by phone and/or mail.

SIGN UP SHEET FOR AMERICANS STUDYING _____ (Foreign Language) Please circle: Beg InM Adv (Level)

	NAME	PHONE NUMBER	BEST TIME TO CALL YOU	MAJOR/INTERESTS	YOUR AGE (optional)	WANT MALE OR FEMALE PARTNER
1.						
2.						
3.						
4.						
5.						
6.						
7.						
8.						
9.						
10.						
11.						
12.						

c Fragiadakis

(please use other side if necessary)

Professors and teaching assistants should be asked to read the letter to their classes, pass the sign-up sheets around, and promptly return the lists to the English program. Meanwhile, the conversation exchange should be explained to students in the English program, with similar sign-up sheets circulated.

Insert #3

INSTRUCTIONS TO ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROGRAM
(ELP) TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

TO: Fluency Teachers

FROM: Amy Licwinko

RE: CONVERSATION EXCHANGE PROGRAM

1. Please explain the program to your students. Tell them that the program is entirely optional. Use the attached letter to explain the exchange (you can pass this around).

2. Pass the sign-up sheet around. Explain that I will do my best to find partners for all students who sign up, but occasionally it happens that all students cannot have partners.

3. Offer to help students make the first phone call if they are "phone shy." Fluency teachers (Level 12 & 13 = beginning level): Please plan to practice "THE FIRST PHONE CALL" in class. Even a first meeting can be role played.

Throughout the quarter, please try to get feedback on how the exchange is going. If students can't reach their partners, or if they don't like them, it may be possible to reassign them. This can only happen if I know about it. Also, if students decide not to call their partners, please have them return the assignments so that the Americans can be reassigned.

PLEASE RETURN THE SIGN-UP SHEETS TO MY MAILBOX BY THIS FRIDAY. Thanks.

CONVERSATION EXCHANGE PROGRAM -- ELP Project #4

SECTION: _____
QUARTER: _____
FLUENCY TCHR: _____

SIGN-UP SHEET FOR FOREIGN STUDENTS

Dear Students,

If you are interested in meeting an American student who is studying your native language, please fill in the information below. We will do our best to give you the phone number of an American so that you can have a conversation exchange. The exchange is between you and your partner--you decide where, when, and how long to meet. During your meetings you should speak English 50% of the time, and your native language 50% of the time.

NAME	NATIVE LANGUAGE	MAJOR/INTERESTS/HOBBIES	YOUR AGE (optional)	DO YOU WANT A MALE OR FEMALE PARTNER

Once all of the sign-up sheets have been collected, the coordinator will need to get to work assigning partners. Matching students by majors is helpful, but not absolutely necessary. Asking students to indicate whether they want a male or female partner is important because there are some students who are more comfortable exchanging conversation with members of their own sex. Usually, however, most students indicate "either" when asked if they want a male or female partner. (We ignore the comments of students who would like the program to be a dating service, but they often give us a good laugh with requests such as "beautiful blonde".)

After the coordinator pairs partners, s/he should give each ESL student a personal note containing the partner's name, phone number and the best time to call. The first phone calls are made by the ESL students because it is too cumbersome to send their phone numbers back to the campus, and it would take valuable time. [It is important to note that at this time the ESL students will need to become familiar with the telephone answering machine, and the coordinator should bring this to the attention of aural comprehension instructors who might design lessons using typical answering machine recordings.] This note to the ESL students also serves to introduce the coordinator so that when questions, comments and problems arise, the students will know whom to turn to.

CONVERSATION EXCHANGE FOR _____ SECTION: _____

LANGUAGE: _____

CONVERSATION EXCHANGE ASSIGNMENT LETTER GIVEN TO FOREIGN STUDENT

YOUR CONVERSATION PARTNER IS: _____

TELEPHONE: _____

THE BEST TIME TO CALL IS: _____

IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR YOU TO KNOW: If you can not attend the reception, read this:

1. The American is waiting for your phone call. Please call him or her as soon as possible. IF YOU NEED HELP MAKING THE PHONE CALL, ASK ONE OF YOUR TEACHERS TO HELP YOU.

2. During the phone call:
   a) Give the American your phone number.
   b) Plan your first meeting in a public place (maybe a cafe).
   c) Tell your partner what you look like or what you will be wearing when you meet. Get the same information from him/her.

3. At the first meeting:
   a) Expect that if you buy anything (for example, coffee), you pay for yourself and he/she will pay for him/herself.
   b) Decide when, where, and how often to meet. Say that you will speak English 50% of the time, and your native language 50% of the time.

IF THERE ARE ANY PROBLEMS, FOR EXAMPLE:
a) you are not happy with your partner
b) your partner is too busy to meet with you
c) there is no answer when you call,

PLEASE TELL ONE OF YOUR TEACHERS, OR COME TO SEE ME IN THE LEARNING CENTER. I CAN TRY TO GIVE YOU ANOTHER PARTNER!!!

IF YOU DECIDE THAT YOU DO NOT WANT TO HAVE THIS CONVERSATION EXCHANGE, PLEASE GIVE THIS LETTER TO ONE OF YOUR TEACHERS. OTHER STUDENTS ARE WAITING FOR CONVERSATION PARTNERS, AND I CAN GIVE THIS NAME TO SOMEONE ELSE.

If you ever have any questions or comments about this exchange, please feel free to see me in the Learning Center or leave a message in my mailbox.

Good luck, and I hope that you enjoy meeting your partner!!!

Amy Licwinko

c Fragiadakis

During the first phone call the ESL students invite their partners to a reception hosted by the English program. This reception serves as a safe environment in which partners meeting for the first time can "break the ice". Everyone wears name tags which indicate both native and target languages. When the partners meet they are encouraged to decide where and how often they will get together. If it is impossible for partners to go to the reception, we suggest that they plan their first meeting in a public place such as a cafe or a library, and tell each other over the phone what they will be wearing or carrying so that they will be easily identifiable.

During the quarter or semester students should be encouraged to contact the coordinator if there are any problems because it is often possible to reassign students when more than enough American names are submitted. Frequently American partners can be found off campus if there is a need. For instance, to reach the community, we advertise in the U.C. Extension catalog and have found that there are many people in the workforce who welcome the opportunities that a conversation exchange affords. To be ready for calls from the general community, the secretaries in our main office are prepared with "phone-in" sign-up sheets.

Naturally, after all of this work, we are always curious about how the exchanges worked out, so we designed two evaluation forms -- one for the native speakers of English and the other for our students:

EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE--AMERICANS

BERKELEY: UNIVERSITY EXTENSION

English Language Program
2223 Fulton Street
Berkeley, CA 94720
ATTN: Amy Licwinko

TO AMERICAN PARTICIPANTS IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROGRAM CONVERSATION EXCHANGE:

We are happy that we could arrange for you to meet a native speaker of the language that you are studying. We would like to continue this conversation exchange program and would appreciate it if you would take the time to fill out the questionnaire below.

Please return it through Campus Mail in the attached envelope. (There is a box for Campus Mail in any Department Office.)

Thank you,

Amy Licwinko
Head Teaching Assistant

1. Approximately how many times did you and your partner meet? _____

2. Approximately how much time did you spend speaking English? _____
   your foreign language? _____
   Why? _____

3. Do you feel that you have made any improvement in your ability to converse in your foreign language? _____YES _____NO

   If yes, has the conversation exchange contributed to this improvement? _____YES _____NO

4. Do you plan to keep in touch with your conversation partner? _____YES _____NO

5. Would you be interested in the same program next quarter? _____YES _____NO

   If yes: a) Language that you are studying: _____
   b) Name: _____
   c) Phone number: _____
   d) Major: _____
   e) Prefer male or female partner: _____

6. COMMENTS:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

c Fragiadakis

EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE--FOREIGN STUDENTS Form #4

ELP NATIVE LANGUAGE _____

EVALUATION OF THE CONVERSATION EXCHANGE PROGRAM
BY STUDENTS WHO RECEIVE CONVERSATION PARTNERS

1. Did you call the American whose phone number you received? Yes _____ No _____

   (a) If "No", why didn't you call? _____

   (b) If "Yes", did you meet the American? Yes _____ No _____

   Approximately how many times did you meet? _____

   Did you meet other Americans through your exchange partner? _____

   Approximately how much time did you spend speaking English? _____%
   your native language? _____%

   Why? _____.

2. Did you learn more about American life because of this experience? _____

3. Was this a good experience? Yes _____ No _____

   If you answered "NO" for #3 please write your partner's name here and tell me why it was a bad experience. Your partner's name _____.
   Reason: _____.

4. COMMENTS: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Thank you for taking the time to answer these questions. I would like to continue this program next quarter and your information will be helpful.

Please return this form to one of your teachers or to Amy Licwinko. (You can use the mailbox for the Learning Center on the third floor with the Teacher's mailboxes.)

c Fragiadakis

When these forms are returned to us we read them with avid interest. It is difficult to describe how rewarding it feels to read comments informing us that partners have become roommates or that they have made plans to meet abroad. Frequently foreign students describe their exchanges as the best part of their visit to the United States. It is also true that we have received a number of negative comments pointing out problems that we try to solve (when they are "solvable," i.e., when the problem is not one of personality.)

The following contains comments, both positive and negative, written by foreign and American students:

AS=American students
FS=Foreign students

FEEDBACK*

General Positive Comments (AS)

1. Duccio is a wild and crazy guy. Meeting him really intensified my desire about the Italian culture and life. This program is an excellent idea and I am very happy to participate. Thank you!
2. The conversation exchange is a fine, valuable service, and fun! This is the third time I have done it.
3. I am pleased to have been granted the opportunity to become acquainted with someone from South America, Colombia, to be exact, especially with someone as likeable as Gloria. I only hope that she enjoyed the program as much as I did.
4. Thank you. This is an excellent idea. We appreciate your setting this up. (The summer was very successful.) --Japanese Department
5. May I please take this time to commend you and those working with you on such a wonderful job you are accomplishing here.
6. It was much more beneficial and enjoyable than I had anticipated--it was a very positive experience.
7. I really enjoyed the conversation exchange. I not only learned more about the French language, but I also learned more about the culture.
8. I enjoyed meeting with my partner very much. Had the length of stay been longer, I am sure he and I would have developed a very good friendship. This was my first time participating in the program. I found the program beneficial to my language development and personally rewarding. I hope I'll be able to meet with other students in future quarters.

General Positive Comments (FS)

9. He is a good conversation partner for me. He introduced me his Japanese friends who have lived here for more than four years. I found that it was very difficult to explain my own language to him, but it was good experience.
10. My partner had been Japan. She knows about the Japanese customs well. We could learn language through the culture. We had a really good time talking about different idea and life style. I think this is very good way to communicate with American.
11. Maybe this is a matter of luck! My partner is the great conversation partner who I can find. I know now more about American life. Now finally I have a American friend!
12. My conversation partner introduced me to other american people who are studying italian. We went out also with other italian friends for dinner a lot of time and we had a very good time.
13. Now the conversation partners are my friends. It is a nice experience for me. Now I know the American people and their lives.
14. I think this program is good. No matter how much we have learned from the partners, but we made friends. We talked and exchanged ideas. After this quarter, our American friends are still our friends.

15. I met him every week and sometimes he invites me for dinner with his friend.

16. Was a very nice experience because I meet nice people. I went to see movies and lectures at U.C. Berkeley. Often we went to S.F. and there I meet a lot of friends.

17. Is very important a conversation partner because you feel free and you can speak about more things and really you can know about American people.

18. I really enjoyed this experience because in my opinion it's the best way to learn English. It's natural and interesting as well. The best thing is to learn from experience rather than books. I think we had a good time!

19. She is very beautiful.

20. She is the same partner from the last session. Our good relationship has been continuing.

Matching Different Levels

21. Because I have an inadequate background (only one quarter of Japanese and my language partner had 10 years of English) we ended up speaking mostly English. However, we did make an attempt to speak 50% Japanese and English by alternating everytime we met. I'm finding the exchange rewarding and look forward to continuing with the program--hopefully with the same person. (AS)

22. This exchange was helpful. There was a great discrepancy in levels. Masa has studied English for about 10 years, while I am in my first quarter of Japanese. Most of the conversations were in English, as you can imagine. I did get a lot of information about reading, writing and vocabulary even though the medium of communication was English. It is a good program, and I plan to supplement next quarter's class with it. (AS)

23. As far as personalities and interests go, I think ours was an excellent match. I still don't know enough of my foreign language to be able to do much real conversing. Each time my partner and I get together I show her what I've learned since our last meeting and that helps her in helping me. (AS)

24. The reason why the rate of English/Japanese that we speak is so unbalanced is that I have completed only one year and am not able to speak well. Anyway, I am very glad that I decided to join the program. It has been a very worthwhile experience. I have learned a great deal about my partner's country and I have gained a good friend(s). (AS)

25. I think we have a good relationship. The reason why we speak English more than my native language is that she is a beginner of Japanese. (FS)

26. This person's Spanish was so good that I felt embarrassed about speaking such poor English. (FS)

Asian American Partners

27a. She was American-Chinese. I wanted a native American. She had a Chinese life. (FS)

b. He is a Korean-American who was born here. The program is really helpful to me. (FS)

Unbalanced Use of Time

28. He was an American who came from Korea. He want only to use Korean, but I don't want to use Korean. So we didn't meet any more. (FS)

29. He didn't want to cooperate. He wanted to speak Spanish all the time. (FS)

Personality Factors

30. I didn't like my partner. The program is a good idea but I didn't get along with my partner. (FS)

31. Sometimes I feel the American is not so enthusiastic to exchange the conversation. Enthusiastic partner is preferred. (FS)

32. Conversation between two strangers is hard to continue. There is always a lull when we meet. Moreover, I don't know how to help him studying my native language since he always says his only problem is to study harder by himself. So I don't feel comfortable this conversation exchange. (FS)

33. I didn't know that American people are like that. (FS)

34. Before I met my conversation partner I always scared to talk with Americans because I still felt my English is not enough and also I am shy. Since I knew my conversation partner I have gotten a lots of courage to speak and to improve my English anyway. This was a good experience for me. (FS)

35. The conversation partner was very kind but a little bit shy. She didn't talk a lot so I had to ask her a lot of questions and it was sometimes tiring. She was not relaxed enough. (FS)

Age/Sex

36. It was a good thing to have a conversation partner. But I would advise for the next time to care a bit about the age. She was very nice, but very young (19). I think she didn't feel very comfortable with me because of my age. (FS)

37. What I really liked is that my partner was older and more mature with strong career goals. As a grad student it makes it much easier to talk about more meaningful things that I can relate to. (AS)

38. I thought it was too late to start something from my age but I was encouraged by my exchange partner through how American women think and live. (FS)

39. I prefer men to women because, if the partner is womon it's hard to search subjects. (FS)

Trouble Making Contact

40. I once called him up on the phone but he wasn't in his house. (FS)

41. I couldn't find the Americans given to me by the ESL. One of them had dropped her Spanish class and the other one wasn't at home for 5 times I called her. (FS)

Busy Schedules

42. I had two partners, one of whom I could never see after Nov. 1 because she said she had to always study, first for the TOEFL test and then for finals. Oh, well. The other I saw about 2 or 3 times per week. (AS)

43. I think this program is very good. I'd like to have much more meetings. But it seems that all American University students are busy in their lives. So, it's better if I could have one more partner. (FS)

44. My conversation partner and I have become quite good friends, and we will definitely keep in touch--he will probably be here next semester too. My only regret was that because we were both busy with other things we could not practice as much as we would have liked. (AS)

Busy Schedules (continued)

45. Maybe it would be good to get more than one partner because most of the Californian people have not much time. (FS)

46. I would like to have more time with a partner. My partner was very busy. (FS)

47. We couldn't find a time to meet that was convenient for both of us. (FS)

48. As my class is in the afternoon and my partner's class is in the morning, we haven't had enough time to meet. I wish I had been able to meet more. (FS)

Always Available

49. My partner is a nice man. He is very kind. Sometimes he corrected my mistake in speaking English. When I wanted to see him, he never refused. I like him very much. (FS)

No Guarantee

50. I'm having a great time with my partner but apparently the other students in my Japanese class who signed up for the program haven't received any calls from their partners. They are a little discouraged. (AS)

Stood Up

51. I called him many times, but an answer machine always said, "he is not at home, please say you're name and telephone number." I did that. When finally I could talk to him, he told me about an appointment. I was there one hour and he never came. (FS)

Americans are known throughout the world to be primarily monolingual, with one explanation being that we can go thousands of miles (in and out of our own country) without needing to know another language. But the truth is that many of us do want to know other languages and find this situation frustrating. What we should not overlook is the fact that native speakers of numerous other languages are constantly entering our country. These people can be a great resource to us and we to them. All that is really necessary is to find facilitators to set up programs to get potential partners together. And what is really wonderful is that in addition to obtaining conversation practice, many partners have developed new friendships and increased cross-cultural awareness, both of which are invaluable in creating international understanding.